



Lenin in disguise, 1917

Consequences of Imperialist War

The origin of the Age of Imperialism, when it became dominant in the world, were in the Imperial wars at the turn of the 19th to the 20th centuries, and most notably, the Anglo-Boer War.

The Anglo-Boer War is the most typical of these original wars, because it showed most clearly what the nature of the new capitalist Imperialism was. Britain made war on the Boer Republics, not so as to rule them directly, and certainly not to liberate the black people living under those racist regimes; but only to possess the gold mines and other such assets as they might wish to have.

The recent Imperialist war on Libya is not different in overall nature.

The typical tactic of Imperialism is not direct colonialism, but

indirect, neo-colonialism. As the 20th century went on, the obligations that went with direct rule were increasingly abandoned. As a counter to the National Democratic Revolutions, neo-colonialism was more and more substituted for the older system of direct colonial rule.

This much was described by Lenin in the text that went with the previous post in this series. Lenin paid close attention to the question of Imperialism and wrote a lot about it.

It may be helpful for us to look briefly at the general situation before 1916, and thereafter. The Great Powers had gone to war in 1914, as a consequence of the tensions that Imperialism had brought with it, in a finite, limited world that had been divided between the major powers, but unevenly.

The Workers' (Second) International had, instead of opposing the war, collapsed. The socialist parties of the contending powers had nearly all opted to support their different bourgeois governments in the terrible mutual slaughter and destruction.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks refused to support the war. They formed the major force in the small "Zimmerwald" International, together with other formations that wanted to maintain the international working-class position of opposition to capitalist war.

By that time Lenin had been in exile for many years. He returned from Switzerland to Russia in April, 1917, a few

weeks after the February revolution of that year.

In “The Nascent Trend of Imperialist Economism” (attached), Lenin attacks the “Imperialist Economism” that is against the right to self-determination and against democracy.

Imperialist Economism has *“the knack of persistently ‘sliding’ from recognition of imperialism to apology for imperialism (just as the Economists of blessed memory slid from recognition of capitalism to apology for capitalism),”* says Lenin.

“Economism” is Syndicalism, or in South African parlance, “Workerism”. It is the belief that trade union struggles alone can solve the problems of the working class. It is reformist, and it relies upon the promises of development of the capitalist economy, with no plans to overthrow it.

“Imperialist Economism” took the reformist logic one step further, to say that Imperialism should be allowed to develop to its fullest, in the belief that when the whole world had become one big monopoly, it could simply be taken over and re-named socialism. The Imperialist Economists promoted the idea that socialism was the end-destination of the Imperialist bus-ride, and that all that was necessary was to get on the bus and encourage Imperialism’s progress, in the name of socialism.

The German Social-Democrat Karl Kautsky, whom Lenin called a “renegade”, and “no better than a common liberal”, became the prophet of Imperialist Economism.

In the face of this particular brand of treacherous liquidationism, Lenin was obliged to re-state the necessity for the right of nations to self-determination (see the second attached item). This is a longer document. In it, early on, under the heading “Socialism and the Self-Determination of Nations”, Lenin wrote: *“We have affirmed that it would be a betrayal of socialism to refuse to implement the self-determination of nations under socialism.”*

So as not to make this introduction too long, let us sum up:

- There is no final separation between socialism and internationalism (“Workers of the World, Unite!”) but
- Nations have the right of self-determination

Using the next item we will see the consequence of this struggle of ideas, as it affected the world after the Russian Revolution, and after the Imperialist world war of 1914 -1918 was over. We will see that Lenin personally, and the Communist International in particular, were able to map out the line of march for the National Democratic Revolutions that subsequently liberated most of the planet, including, eventually, South Africa, from direct colonialism.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-texts: [The Nascent Trend of Imperialist Economism, 1916, Lenin](#), and [The Right of Nations to Self-Determination, 1916, Lenin](#), and [Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up, 1916, Lenin](#).
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